

## MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

### 1. HOMOSEXUALITY IN ASIATIC LION: A CASE STUDY FROM GIR NATIONAL PARK AND SANCTUARY

The Asiatic lion (*Panthera leo persica*) is a social animal and its natural sexual behaviour is in general restricted to heterosexualism, but there are a few exceptions. The heterosexual behaviour of Asiatic lions of the Gir Protected Areas (PA) is recorded and described in detail by Joslin (1973) and Sinha (1987). In 1982, Chauhan reported homosexuality (lesbianism) in the Asiatic lioness of Gir. But homosexuality in male Asiatic lions, which are prime territorial males, has never been recorded before in detail with photographic evidence.

A pair of prime territorial males about 6 to 7 years, from Khokhra, showed this unusual behaviour when they were not with females. This dominant pair hold a territory of about 70 sq. km, which falls in Sasan (Amritvel, Gebi-amba, Bavalbalachowk, Kankai naka area) and Dedakadi range (Pilipat, Kadeli, Ratanguna area) of the western part of Gir PA, for the last one and a half years. This area has four prime females with cubs. The Khokhra males have an established record of mating with three females of the Khokhra territory, of which two females now have four cubs.

Homosexual activity among these two males was first observed by a group of trackers in November 1999, for five days continuously, and later in December 1999, for three days. The method of mounting, time taken during mounting, repulsive action after mounting seen in the Khokhra males is similar to heterosexual mating.

Only the larger male would mount the smaller one, which showed a subservient attitude

and played the role of the receptive partner. The smaller male rarely growled, unlike the larger during mating. Each mounting lasted for about 12 to 23 seconds and the gap between two incidents varied from 4-12 minutes. The frequency of mating increased during the morning and evening hours. Of the 45 mountings observed, the smaller male showed repulsive action in four cases, which may be due to the actual anal penetration during mating. During the homosexual activity period, the animals avoided food, but changed their area, which is unusual during heterosexual mating.

The areas in which the Khokhra males move have a low female population, and most of the females are engaged in rearing cubs. Due to overlapping of territories, there is increasing pressure on the males to protect their territories from other males. There is also a possibility that the Khokhra females are mating with other males. November and December are the peak period for mating of lions in Gir PA. All these factors may have contributed to the unusual sexual behaviour observed.

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